



social security

STORIES PROJECT

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FRANCES
PERKINS
CENTER

MEDIA CONTACT:

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Full press kit available at
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INTERVIEW WITH BARBARA BURT EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE FRANCES PERKINS CENTER

How did the Social Security Stories Project come about?

“This year marks the 75th anniversary of the signing of the Social Security Act. Frances Perkins said many times that she felt Social Security was her most important accomplishment. As we thought about ways to celebrate this important anniversary, it occurred to us that many people take the Social Security program for granted, or think it's just for old people, or that it's going to disappear in a few years. We wanted to let people know that this program has changed millions of Americans' lives and is still going strong, and we thought the best way to do that is through their own stories in their own words.”

What type of stories are you hoping to collect with this project? Who do you want to hear from?

“We are looking for all kinds of stories from people of all ages in all walks of life across the country. The stories can be simple personal reminiscences, or family memories that have been passed down through several generations. Some of the stories will be sad and others will be joyful. We hope they will represent the vast spectrum of people whose lives have been changed by Social Security.”

What do you think people don't know about Social Security and the people who utilize it? Why is it important to give these people a voice?

“People tend to think of Social Security as a retirement insurance program. It is that -- and has lifted America's elderly out of poverty -- but it is also much more. Social Security provides needed support to children who lose a parent, even helping them with college expenses. Social Security provides support to workers who become disabled.”

Why do you want to publish a book? Are there any other plans for the stories?

“We want to reach as many people as possible with these personal testimonies and the story of Social Security. Besides a book, we will have a website. But a book is not as temporary as a website; it can be picked up and read when away from a computer; it can be passed around among friends and neighbors. We want to use as many channels of communication as possible to reach as many people as we can.”

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Honoring & Learning From the First Woman Appointed to a United States Cabinet

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Do any stories you have received to date stand out in your mind?

“There is a wonderful story written by a man whose father was a conductor on the New York Central Railroad. FDR was a frequent passenger. One day, FDR asked the man what sort of retirement insurance program would be helpful to railroad workers. Another person wrote of the death of her son just days after he became a father. She eloquently tells how important Social Security was to her daughter-in-law and baby grandson as they coped with the tragedy.”

Who is this project for?

“The project is for anyone who has or will use Social Security. It is for anyone who knows anyone who has been helped by Social Security. So, it is for everyone. It is also for the generations to come, so they can learn about the legacy of Frances Perkins and the promise of Social Security.”

What do you want this project to accomplish other than publishing a book?

“We want people to know how crucial Social Security is to our economy and our people, young and old. We want them to know how it has transformed America from a society in which people had to work into their old age, depend on their families to support them, or end up in the poorhouse into a society in which the elderly are able to maintain their independence without being a burden to anyone else. We also would like people to understand that Social Security is a social insurance program, not a social welfare program. In other words, everybody pays in and everybody benefits. It's something that all Americans share a stake in. And we want them to know the role that Frances Perkins played in making that and much more happen.”

Anything else you would like to add?

“There's a lot of doom and gloom talk out there. Some people -- wealthy Wall Street types mostly -- think Social Security is a waste and would like to get rid of it. They don't need it themselves, and they don't seem to realize that millions of Americans rely on Social Security benefits as their only source of income. In fact, the program was very well designed and has been well taken care of over the years. Those in charge understand demographics and have made adjustments as our society has changed. It may not be perfect, but it's pretty darn good. And it's not going to disappear if we continue that stewardship for future generations.”

(THE END)

IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO SCHEDULE YOUR OWN INTERVIEW WITH BARBARA BURT, OR OTHER EXPERTS ON THE SUBJECT OF SOCIAL SECURITY AND/OR THE LEGACY OF FRANCES PERKINS, MAKE A REQUEST BY SENDING AN EMAIL TO media@socialsecuritystories.org.

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